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EDITORIAL

An attack on sound science

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One of those politicians who pretend there's no credible evidence of global warming is resorting to an attack on science that is so outlandish that even his peers are beseeching him to stop.

Nobody would have a plumber evaluate a neurosurgeon, but U.S. Rep. Joe Barton is heeding an "amateur statistician" who finds fault with the work of professional scientists. Now he's ordered an investigation. It's silly and dangerous - the worry is that the assault against the science of global warming may have a chilling effect in the lab.

Barton, a Texas Republican and chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, is on the warpath against five experts who study climate change. He is seeking information about the researchers' personal and financial histories, including diaries, canceled checks and the like.

In launching his witch hunt, Barton cites an analysis of the scientists' work by two Canadian critics, neither of whom is a scientist. (One is an economist, the other a mining engineer described in press reports as "an amateur statistician.") Yet the studies in question were previously analyzed and accepted by true climate scientists with real expertise.

Last week, House Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert, R-N.Y., urged Barton to call off his inquiry, saying, "My primary concern about your investigation is that its purpose seems to be to intimidate scientists rather than to learn from them, and to substitute congressional political review for scientific review." He blasted Barton's effort as an attempt to "have Congress put its thumbs on the scales of a scientific debate," adding, "When it comes to scientific debates, Congress is all thumbs."

Also on the science committee is Colorado Rep. Mark Udall, whose district includes offices of the National Center for Atmospheric Research, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and other Boulder-based labs engaged in climate studies. Barton's actions, Udall says, are an attack on science itself.

Boehlert isn't known for rocking the boat, so the confrontation with Barton has raised GOP eyebrows. It's Boehlert's science committee, not Barton's energy and commerce panel, which has jurisdiction on climate change matters. So Barton not only had an unbelievably bad idea, he lacks the standing to even advance it.

So far, Barton hasn't responded to Boehlert's well-aimed complaint.

Centuries ago, when the Inquisition forced Galileo to renounce his work that proved that the Earth revolves around the sun, legend has it that Galileo muttered: "Nevertheless, it moves." Today, Barton might force climate scientists to utter: Nevertheless, it's getting warmer.